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Military memoirs, their covers, and the reproduction of public narratives of war.

Rachel Woodward and K.Neil Jenkins

Abstract

This article explores the role of the covers of military memoirs in articulating and reproducing ideas about men at war. Drawing on the range of published military memoirs about service with the British armed forces from 1980 onwards, the article looks at the covers of these texts as paratextual features which provide a threshold for the reader. The article explores how these covers contribute to public narratives of war which include discourses which prioritise a specific model of military masculinity. It does this by examining features such as specific design features, dominant conventions and changes in covers over time. The article concludes with a discussion of the ways in which memoir covers correspond with the stylistic conventions and discourses about men and war evident in other media entertainment formats. It also considers the disparity often evident between the messages promoted by a cover's design and that of the text itself.

Key words: military, memoir, armed forces, narrative, book covers, paratext

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Military memoirs, the personal narratives about experiences of military participation, have long been a source of social ideas about men and war. These are books written overwhelmingly by men, about a specific aspect of experiences in war that remain predominantly those of men. From the emergence of the genre in the mid-19th century to the present, of the many readings possible of such texts, that of the gendered nature of military experience is an enduring one. This observation holds whether we consider the popular reading and consumption of these narratives, or the extension of their representations of war post-publication across different media and into public discourse, or the critical scholarly examination of these texts as sources for such representations (Duncanson 2009, 2010, 2012, Higate 2003, Newsinger 1997, Woodward 2003).

In this article, we examine contemporary British military memoirs for what they say about representations of men at war. However, we do so not with reference to the texts themselves (illuminating though this has proven to be), but through an examination of the ideas produced and put into circulation by the covers of these books. Our intention in doing so is to extend the possibilities for the scholarly use of memoirs by pointing to the additional insights into the form and function of such texts generated by consideration of what has been termed the ‘paratext’. Identified within literary theory as a threshold to a text or a zone of transaction between author and reader, the concept of paratext points to the work done by features which may be ‘verbal or not’ which frame the text and thus encourage a particular reading, through ‘the privileged site of a pragmatics and of a strategy, of an action on the public in the service, well or badly understood and accomplished, of a better reception of the text and a more pertinent reading – more pertinent, naturally in the eyes of the author and his allies’ (Genette 1991: 261-2). In using the concept here, we refer to the textual and the visual, the verbal and the non-verbal, the conceptual and the material. Our specific argument in this article is that the packaging and presentation of very many military memoirs articulates and reproduces a culturally dominant discourse of war as a heroic, male adventure. These books convey through their covers a set of ideas about male military participation, to a readership which is understood by publishers to anticipate – and to feel comfortable with – a very specific articulation of the nature of the combat experience. A close reading of book covers as the frame for the reading of a text also points to the complexities of the gendering of war in contemporary popular cultural forms; some books may offer counter-narratives to the dominant ideas of military masculinity which their covers and others in the genre articulate and reproduce. We argue here that public narratives of the experience of war are constituted

and expressed by the covers of military memoirs, which although they change over time articulate quite consistently a set of ideas about men at war which may be at odds with the authorial arguments of the texts which they contain. We argue also that the marketing strategies of publishers reflected in the covers of memoirs over the past two decades demonstrate the extent to which the memoir as a cultural product is associated with contemporary representations of warfare as entertainment, which in turn has consequences for public understanding of the male soldier and his humanity.

We should emphasise from the start two points about our analytic approach. First, although we are approaching the book covers of contemporary military memoirs with the construction of ideas about military masculinities as starting point, as we hope to show through our exegesis of these covers, a gendered reading of cover design is only one of a number of ideas mobilized through the visual and textual information which frames these texts. Together, these ideas contribute to a cultural understanding of contemporary warfare, and there is a more abstract, more theoretical issue at work here about militarism and how it operates as a cultural force. Whilst gender is an aspect of cultural militarism, militarism is not reducible to it. In other words, we cannot just assess (and possibly dismiss) these books as ‘warry books for blokes’, but need to see them as cultural artefacts of the media industry which shape understandings of war and its practices of participation. By ‘militarism’, we mean the extension of military priorities and objectives into civilian spheres as a temporally and spatially contingent process which normalizes war and preparations for war (Woodward 2005). Second, our focus in this article is primarily on a reading of the visual and textual contents of book covers, informed by interviews with authors and insights into the processes around their production. Although we have a number of observations about the consumption and readership of these books, this is of less concern here.

In this article we introduce the contemporary British military memoir and suggest that it has a role in the constitution of public narratives of war. We then go on to discuss a number of aspects of memoir covers, including prevailing features, tastes and trends in cover design, the significance of changes over time in cover designs for specific books, and the functions served to the genre by marketing blurbs. Using the illustrative example of a recent best-seller, we develop an insight into the care and labour which goes towards the production of a product for the market. We conclude with a discussion of the disjuncture between the models of military masculinity articulated by many contemporary memoir texts and the models reinforced and informing the covers of such books, noting the tension between appeals made

by the cover to wider discourses on men at war, and those evident on opening the book and starting to read.

Personal memoirs and public narratives

This article has its genesis in a project examining the social production of the contemporary British military memoir.¹ Military memoirs are defined as the personal narratives of individuals writing about their experiences of participation in armed conflict, and for our purposes are distinct from the accounts of conflict produced by journalists and historians, and from accounts of conflict by military personnel drawing on secondary (i.e. non-personal) sources. The research project on military memoirs examined how they come into being by looking at the processes of authorship and publication, and draws exclusively on memoirs published about participation with British armed forces from 1980 to the present.

From the very start of this research, as we went through the process of collecting together as many memoirs as we could find which fitted into our category (over 150 at the time of writing), it was apparent that the covers of these books merited scrutiny in their own right. Initially, this was because as the collection of books mounted up on our desks, and as we started to sort them into organised piles, the analytic category of ‘book covers’ seemed as significant as that of other organisational categories such as sub-type within the genre, or time-period or conflict described, or rank of author. Visually, there are dominant stylistic conventions evident in the covers of these memoirs. Notable features include the colours and tones of the principal background shades to the cover (black was popular, but is currently being overtaken by hues of beige and desert dust), the use of distinctive stencil fonts, the use of regimental insignia, the use of endorsement quotations by other memoirists, and the use of images of soldiers on the cover (who may or may not be the author). Of course there are exceptions, but to get a sense of some of these features, see the examples at Figures 1 and 2 which show, respectively, the covers to Andy McNab’s *Bravo Two Zero* (first published in 1993) and Dan Mills’ *Sniper One* (this edition published in 2008). We will return to examine these in more detail below; our point here is about the unity of the genre that is enabled by a common design framework of the covers of so many of these books, despite the fact that the texts themselves, on close reading, can often resist the conformity of the genre of the military memoir.

[Figures 1 and 2 about here]

As the project progressed, the covers recurred as a distinct phenomenon because of the observations authors had to make about their production. As part of the investigation into the processes of authorship and publication, a number of authors were interviewed about their book(s), and all of our interviewees explained that although they might have had input at some stage during the design of the cover, most usually through the provision of personal photographs, the production of the cover was a process very different to that of the production of the text within. Furthermore, we could make some rather basic observations about the memoirs in our genre on the basis of the location of these books in the bookshops we visited to purchase many of these titles. They are, with one exception that we can identify², located in sections entitled 'Military' or 'Military History'. Whilst these bookshops also have shelving sections entitled 'Autobiography', 'Painful Lives' or 'Tragic Life Stories', and whilst many of the texts could be read under those rubrics, these memoirs are not shelved there. From the perspective of their authors, these books are generally seen as contributions to the civilian public's understanding of military experience and endeavour. In contemporary publishing terms they are seen as products within a marketable genre, into which investment is made with the intention by marketing and sales teams of selling as many copies as possible.

Our initial observations, then, are that contemporary British military memoirs as a genre are constituted as such through the design and marketing strategies which frame a text on publication. This observation resonates with that of scholars writing about personal narratives or testimonies of war in many different textual formats, who argue that the dominant force shaping such narratives is popular conventions of representation, such that individual experience is always represented with reference to and in accordance with wider public narratives of soldiering (Roper 2000). We can extend this argument by arguing that this is not just a feature of textual representation but is a visual and material feature too. Furthermore, these public narratives of soldiering (Roper 2000, after Dawson 1994), these shared and generalized ideas of what it means to be a military operative which circulate as phenomena within social life are, as our collection of memoirs demonstrates, both constitutive of the genre and constituted by it. Michael Roper observes how personal accounts are not produced in isolation from public narratives, but must operate in their terms through 'the working of past experience into available cultural scripts' (Roper 2000:183). We would go one step further here, and argue that these available cultural scripts are in turn

constituted through the processes by which personal accounts are brought into being in material form. The covers of these military memoirs, then, provided another way of exploring how this process operates, with an assumption that covers would fairly accurately reflect many of the ideas about military masculinities articulated within the texts. However, the relationship between the book and its cover is not straightforward.

Judging a book by its cover

We should be clear here about the material form which is our focus, and about popular conventions and public expectations about the function of book jackets. Decades past, statements such as Jan Tschichold's, that 'as a rule, book-jackets belong in the waste paper basket, like empty cigarette packages' would have carried weight because of the different function of the cover being described compared with the covers of today (Tschichold 1995, quoted in Rota 1998: 124). As G. Thomas Tanselle, a leading authority on bibliography in an article about book-jackets, observed 'there remains a curious disregard for them in many quarters' (Tanselle 1971, 2003-4). Tanselle's focus is on the detachable paper jacket which was used from the mid-19th century onwards for the protection of hard-cover books which had been bound by the publisher rather than by the purchaser in accordance with prevailing practices at the time. In this article, we attend both to detachable jackets of hardback books and to the covers of paperback books, which have a slightly different material form and paratextual function in the contemporary period. As Tanselle makes clear, the entity which we refer to here as book covers presents considerable scope for studies such as this, of the visual and textual messages of this element of paratext, as well as for studies which are more bibliographic in orientation. Here, we limit our discussion to covers as indicative of prevailing tastes in the market for particular types of books at the time of their publication, to the utility of covers for reconstructing the marketing and publishing history of specific books, to the functions served by publishers' blurbs on cover, and to the use of images on covers.

Covers reflect prevailing tastes in the market for books at the time of publication (Tanselle 2003-4, Rota 1998). We can explore this idea of changing tastes in the market for military memoirs by comparing three examples from across our period of study. Figure 3 shows the front cover of Hugh McManners' *Falklands Commando*, published originally in 1984 and one of the first accounts from a military operative of that conflict (McManners 1984). McManners' cover is representative of many of the early Falklands books, which used

personal photographs of their author and/or fellow personnel taken during the British military campaign on the islands in 1982. The photographs speak to the idea of participation in armed conflict as a lived and personal experience that is costly to the individual both physically and mentally; Figure 4 from Vincent Bramley's original *Excursion to Hell* (1991) makes the same point. The idea articulated by the image and its textual framing speaks to Noah Harari's observation about the military memoir in the late modern period as essentially revelatory (Harari 2008). The revelation here is of the costs and potential traumas of war, a familiar public narrative of war consolidated over the course of the 20th century not least by memoirs from the First and Second World Wars (for an overview, see Winter 2006).

[Figure 3 and 4 about here]

Compare Figure 3 with Figure 1, from McNab's *Bravo Two Zero* first published in 1993. This book is still in print, and has sold at least 1.5 million copies. The author's name (more correctly, pen-name) is extremely well-known. Indeed, for many readers of this article, this name may be the only familiar one of all the authors we cite, even if they have not read any of his books; McNab's success with his first book has been followed by a number of fiction and non-fiction publications and a great deal of involvement in multiple media formats. He is a brand name. What is interesting to us here is how the cover of his first book offers a threshold (in paratextual terms) to an account which resists the conventional revelatory tropes of both the futility of war, which had dominated the genre to that point in time, and more idealistic and positive revelatory accounts about discovery of the self, which is a feature of some accounts. Instead, war is presented in the text as a heroic endeavour undertaken by sternly self-controlled, rigorously trained and highly skilled professional operatives, existing in a hetero-normative and masculinist culture. *Bravo Two Zero* is an exemplar of the textual representation of a specific model of military masculinity which has come to dominate public narratives about soldiering. Three features of the cover stand out in this threshold to the text. One is the insignia of winged dagger and 'Who Dares Wins' motto of the Special Air Service, an elite Army unit which as John Newsinger (1997) observes has currency in popular cultural imaginaries of the British Army out of all proportion to its size as a unit (see also Connelly and Willcox 2005). The second is the citation of the military honours 'DCM' and 'MM'. These letters are either read and understood for their meaning by potential purchasers and readers, or they are not; one's comprehension is contingent on one's knowledge of the military honours system. The Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) was for distinguished conduct in the field and the Military Medal was awarded for bravery in the

field:³ both were awarded to ‘other ranks’, i.e. non-officers, prior to the 1993 review of the honours system. Both awards entitle their recipients to use the initials after their name, and for this reason we could expect McNab to use them as indeed many other authors do. What is interesting is the function of the military honours in providing McNab, who at the time of first publication was entirely unknown, with ‘platform’ from which to speak. The idea of authorial platform is explored by John Thompson in his examination of the publishing industry; he defines it as ‘the position from which an author speaks, a combination of their credentials, visibility and promotability, especially through the media’, and observes that it is particularly important for non-fiction books (Thompson 2010: 203). The letters after McNab’s name, therefore, provide the as-yet-unknown author with authority – he is positioned not just as another soldier, but as a heroic one. At this threshold, the reader invited into the book is primed to expect an account of experience which accords with cultural understandings of the figure of the hero, which of course is gendered male, and which allies closely with many of the salient hegemonic features of military masculinity. A third feature is the use of fire as the colour fill to the block capitals of the title against a black background. Fire is symbolic, simultaneously, of chaos and destruction, and vitality and purification. We have been unable to identify any pre-*Bravo Two Zero* memoir covers which use fire in their cover design although many subsequent examples emulate this design feature. Again, at the threshold to the text the reader is invited to consider the text and its author in a very specific way; fire is not ‘masculine’ as such, but is part of an assemblage which constructs the book as being about simultaneously destruction and re-emergence. Taken as a whole, the cover of this book frames the text as an account of an elite, decorated soldier on a dangerous mission, a point underscored by the sub-title. The title adds to the mystique: it is the call-sign of the unit whilst on the operation described by the book. The reader is told this in the text, but unless the reader has existing military knowledge, the title would otherwise be mysterious. *Bravo Two Zero* is critical in establishing a new set of prevailing tastes for military memoirs, with their emphasis on the skill and self-deprecating heroism of their authors and implicit and explicit valorisation of specific forms of gendered, racialised and sexualised identification.

Compare Figures 1 and 3 with a third, at Figure 2, the cover of Dan Mills’ *Sniper One*, published in 2008 in this paperback edition. The book carries an endorsement from Andy McNab, and thus association with his brand. The cover features three men posed in an observation post, holding sniper rifles at different angles, including one pointed directly at the observer. Cross-hairs from rifle sights, and a title in battered blistered stencil-style font

which seals the connection with the subtitle, work together to form the central image, placed against a desert-coloured backdrop. Published in 2008 following a previous edition in 2007, we can view it (alongside others such as Johnson Beharry's *Barefoot Soldier*, first published 2006, and Chris Hunter's *Eight Lives Down*, first published in 2007) as simultaneously responding to, and creating a demand for, stories about the Iraq war which are positive in some way about the participation of British troops there. In the years following the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by US-led coalition forces, an act which has generated global condemnation and during which the activities of British forces during the Iraq occupation had come under scrutiny and considerable public criticism, books like Mills' offer an alternative narrative. This book, starting with the cover, establishes a linear narrative about a complex deployment, which says little about the logic for deployment and a lot about the experience for those tasked with this operation. The narrative centres around a sniper unit – again, an elite form of soldiering prefigured by the sniper rifles on the cover – and the experience of temporary besiegement in occupied Al Amarah. The text supports a model of the soldier according to many of the principles of hegemonic military masculinity, and close reading of the text suggests a method of writing and editing intended to produce a fast-paced narrative with an emphasis on personal bravery, aggression, risk-taking and resolute heterosexuality. Yet the narrative is also about the vulnerability of the male body at war – it starts with an account of the horrific wounds received by one soldier during a patrol ambush. The vulnerability of the troops as besieged, even before the reader starts with the text, is established; the three figures are shown bare-headed and crouched in defensive positions.

[Figures 5 and 6 about here]

The study of book covers enables the reconstruction of the marketing and publishing history of a book, which again provides information for understanding their constitution and expression of public narratives about armed conflict (Tanselle 1971, 2003-4). The reprinting and republication of memoirs is a feature of their production, with many starting out with small presses and enjoying subsequent sales success with larger publishing houses. For example, Figures 5 and 6 show two very different incarnations of what is essentially the same text. Figure 5 is the 1997 hardback cover of Steve Devereaux's *Terminal Velocity*. The branding associations should be clear enough. Figure 6 shows the cover of Nigel 'Spud' Ely's *For Queen and Country*, published in 2003. Having written and published under a pseudonym, the author had been encouraged by a resurgence of interest in the Falklands War around the time of its 20th anniversary to republish the book, and impetus came also from the

publisher's observation about the continued popularity of the masculinist, hetero-normative, action-adventure, stoic-heroic style first identified with McNab.⁴ There are only minor differences between the texts of the two books, but the covers suggest different approaches to the text. Note, for example, the use of the union flag, the SAS insignia and the Para hat and badge flagging Ely up as an elite soldier in Figure 6. Ely's cover invites the reader to identify the figure shown as the author. He is shown armed with rifle and bayonet, dirtied by combat, and is striking a pose impossible to produce in action but reflective of its aftermath, a pose of alert domination. A further example of covers as illustrative of marketing intentions and histories is provided by Patrick Hennessey's *The Junior Officers' Reading Club*, (Figure 7) published in 2009 and which received high profile coverage at the literary end of the book-buying market with its appearance as a BBC Radio Four 'Book of the Week' in 2010. That this is a book informed by literary sensibilities is indicated by a cover design of nine well-thumbed paperbacks with spines suggestive both of mass-market publications and of the Penguin Modern Classics series. Figure 8 shows the paperback cover, published in 2010, consciously designed to appeal to a younger segment of the reading public with a taste for paperback books to be read at leisure.⁵ Here, the stack of books remain but are reduced in number, and are topped by a pair of aviator sunglasses of a style popular at the time of the books' publication. That this is a military story is indicated by the silhouetted figure of the soldier, rifle and helicopter reflected in one of the lenses (Roderick 2009; Woodward et al 2009). Hennessey's memoir is distinct in tone and structure, striking a different tone with its conscious distancing from the models of military masculinity which saturate much of the contemporary genre and its self-conscious presentation of the author and his fellow officers as distinct in their class and education backgrounds. The text pursues a narrative which evokes those of an early form of the genre, written by officers (Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That* (1957) is a prime example); war is portrayed initially as an exciting boy's adventure, an idea which inevitably sours following contact with violence, grief and trauma. The text's distinctiveness is flagged up in the cover – the soldier is male, but a literary male. A final example of cover change and the ways in which different covers demonstrate an awareness of publishers of the changing market for memoirs comes with the redesign of the cover of McNab's *Bravo Two Zero*. The flaming title against a black background was replaced by 2010 with desert beige and anonymised silhouetted figures. The essence of the soldier is placed in a generic desert, a place that is locatable as foreign and other but essentially unspecified. This we can read as an effort to contemporize a different war; McNab's account is from the first Gulf War in 1991, yet the cover emulates directly those of accounts of the

wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003 onwards. The cover change appears to be capitalizing on the success of more recent accounts for its own sales rejuvenation and the book is repackaged for a new generation responsive to different iconography of war.

[Figures 7 and 8 about here]

We turn now to the work done by textual components within the paratext, the publishers' blurbs on the front and back of these memoirs. Again, following Tanselle, we can view these both in terms of their intrinsic interest in bibliographic terms, and also as evidence for the constitution and expression of the military memoir as a coherent genre. Blurbs may constitute extracts from the text, or may constitute strap-lines and short descriptions, but the intention of both is to lure the reader towards the text inside the covers and the purchase of the book. Commonly, endorsements from reviewers are used to assert the quality of the book and the validity of the story, and are chosen carefully to frame the text; note the quotations from reviewers on the cover of Hennessey's paperback edition, at Figure 8; the promotion of the book as 'nerve-shreddingly intense' suggests an action-adventure narrative, although the textual content resists this model. Returning to the idea of a platform and a brand, we can also consider other authors' endorsements and the work that they do. One such example would be Andy McNab's endorsement of Dan Mills' *Sniper One* and Chris Hunter's *Eight Lives Down*. Dan Mills in turn endorses Mark Hammond's *Immediate Response* (2009). Chris Hunter in turn endorses Kevin Ivison's *Red One* (2010). Endorsements by journalists with established reputations as commentators on defence and military issues are also frequently used; both Damien Lewis and Patrick Bishop feature on the covers of contemporary books about the Afghanistan conflict to endorse these accounts. Key here is the establishment of a platform for the authors, which these endorsements enable, and the constitution of the genre which these endorsements help to facilitate. As Ed Macy noted, regarding the Andy McNab endorsement on the cover of Macy's *Apache* (2008; see Figure 9), 'he's got a massive audience, why not capitalise on this fact when he said he would give us a quote for the book'.⁶ These author endorsements, noticed in passing by purchasers and readers, are clearly part of the overall marketing strategies for these books. From this, we would underscore again the point that the genre is brought into being and constituted by the work undertaken by book covers.

Book covers, then, are significant. They are designed to get a reader's attention sufficient to prompt a purchase in a crowded market (Stokmans and Henrickx 1994). Although the design

of the cover is not the only factor prompting consumer selection, it is, along with author and publisher reputation in the top three most important factors in shaping reader selection (D'Astous et al 2006). We are all, probably, alert to this in any case.⁷ They provide a threshold to the text, reflecting prevailing tastes and ideas about soldiering (and although we have prioritized the gendered aspect of this, this is only part of the story), reflecting changes in this over time. The process of design, including front-cover endorsements, are both constitutive and expressive of dominant public narratives of war and a specific idea of the soldier is prioritised within that. All these ideas come together when we look in detail at one particular book cover, that of Ed Macy's *Apache* (see Figure 9).

[Figure 9 about here]

What is striking, on first viewing, is the relative sizes of the typefaces used for the book title – large, because that is what the book is about – and for the author's name, which is smaller. The name is a pseudonym, chosen by the author in conjunction with the publisher cognisant that it would be unknown to the military memoir-buying public on publication and thus needed to start with a letter in the middle of the alphabet so that it would appear at mid-level, just below eye-level, on the shelves of key bookshops. The cover designer wanted a photograph of the author on the cover, and Macy supplied a photo from his camera phone to try and gauge the type of image required. The designer liked the photograph – it was up-close and personal, and showed a man with a half-day's beard growth which reflected a man in the middle of a 24-hour mission (a central narrative of the book is a particularly long and dangerous flying mission) and resisted the idea of a clean-cut aircraft pilot. Images of the aircraft and of military personnel are then used in the visor's reflection, because

what he wanted to do was capture the mission and that's why he decided – and its nothing to do with me at all – he decided he wanted [...] to see the boys running in there, Apaches lifting, the iconic image of them flying, he wanted the whole mission to unfold in my eyes but using a visor as a reflection.⁸

The dominant colour for the spine and much of the cover was a bright, eye-catching green, because as the designer said, 'you don't want someone trying to find your book'. It is the colour of the instrument display readings on the Apache helicopter, and chosen because 'everything shines [...] that green, even the light coming out of your lips is that green, [...] 'cause that's the green that comes out of it'. The silver foil cover was used, despite the expense this involved in overprinting with colour, to give the book an 'aircraft metal feel', so

that ‘the words ‘Apache’ could stick out in metal, as they should be; this is about a machine, a physical hard machine’. Note that the metal in the book’s title is raw, dented and knocked about to reflect the fact that ‘the aircraft gets dented and knocked but it still keeps coming back. It’s got huge scrape marks down the side of it’ as these aircraft have in reality, with a subliminal message, ‘you know, you can batter me but it’s still going to say what it says’.⁹ The attention to detail in the design of the cover of *Apache* is close, because this was a key publication for HarperPress which invested significant resources in the book in the hope that it would be a best-seller (something which, as John Thompson notes, can never been predicted within the publishing industry). Ed Macy’s *Apache* and his subsequent *Hellfire* (2009) sold very well, with *Apache* selling over 100,000 copies within its first two years of publication.

Book covers, then, are significant to this genre, both for what can be read from the design contents of individual covers, and for what the study of covers within the genre can tell us about their use in the construction and maintenance of that genre by the relevant sections of the publishing industry. Whilst the texts themselves may provide endlessly varied accounts of the individual and personal experience of men at war, for reasons of marketing and sales the publishers will invest considerably in the design of the cover to produce books which in their material form accord with the fairly rigid dominant conventions of the genre as they are manifest at the time of publication. The covers, in many respects, do very different work to the texts themselves.

Discussion: military memoirs and war-as-entertainment

We return now to the starting-point of this article, to consider gender as an analytic frame for understanding these books. We have argued that military memoirs convey through elements of their paratext a set of ideas which frame the text in specified ways in order to reproduce a genre which is tacitly understood to appeal to a specific segment of the book-buying public. These books are written overwhelmingly by men; we have only four examples in our collection of over 150 that are written by military women (Ford 1997, George 1999, Madison 2010, Goodley 2012) or women married to special forces soldiers (Simpson 1996, Nicholson 1997). As we have already noted in our introduction, the texts of the military memoir articulate and reproduce a range of ideas about military activities as male and construct a specific set of ideas about the forms of military masculinities, particularly the hegemonic

masculinities reproduced in armed forces. We could assume, therefore, that the market for these books is predominantly male, and although many of the authors interviewed about their memoirs did not explicitly confirm this, in talking about the readerships for their books, many authors did point to young men with an interest in the armed forces as a key segment of their reading public. We have no way of knowing – because we do not have the data – what proportions of the readership are male or female, but we would assert that they are marketed to appeal directly and primarily to a set of consumer preferences for military participation as essentially a male occupation.

Memoirs have great utility for exploring the ways in which wider public understanding of war are shaped, and (for our purposes here) for understanding the gendering of war, because they articulate a range of ideas around male engagement with armed conflict which can be viewed as a model for a particular incarnation of military masculinity. The covers of memoirs are complicit in promoting this model, even when the text problematizes and destabilizes this model. An example would be the most recent covers, of which *Apache* is an example; the soldier is portrayed as an automaton, a survivor of horror, operating in a vaguely recognizable but essentially un-named unplaceable space.

Although the covers of memoirs sell a specific idea of war as the business of men, it is a moot point as to whether they are written *for* men. Authors interviewed as part of our research reflected that they had no ideal reader motivating the act of writing, arguing instead that they were prompted to write by a desire to communicate to both known individuals (family and friends) and to a wider general public otherwise ignorant of the activities of armed forces. Authors who we interviewed often stated that they received letters from women readers, especially wives of serving and former servicemen, thanking them for helping them understand the experiences of their husbands (who were often silent on the subject). It is also a moot point as to whether military memoirs are purchased predominantly by men; many authors have identified young men as a key segment of their reading public (one author identified ‘white van man’¹⁰ as the key purchaser for his Falklands memoir) and many pointed also to the significance of memoir accounts in shaping their own decision to enlist. We do not have the data to state with confidence the gender of the readership of these books, but would still assert that they are marketed to appeal directly and primarily to a consumer that understands war as essentially a male occupation and the soldier/author as a representative of an ideal type of military man. As one of our authors put it, ‘the majority of people who buy military books are not men, they’re women buying them for their husbands

and boyfriends for Christmas or birthdays and therefore they don't have a clue what they're buying, but they need to pick up something with an explosion, a bomb [on the cover]'.¹¹

There is a wider point to consider here, about the contemporary positioning of the military memoir relative to other media forms through which public narratives of the experience and meaning of engagement in armed conflict are constructed. Memoirs, traditionally, constitute part of the literature of war; they have provided since the mid 19th century, along with fiction and poetry, a means by which ideas about what it means to participate in armed conflict can be communicated through textual form. Whilst the idea of war as revelatory continues to feature significantly in the genre, as it has always done, writing at the end of the first decade of the 21st century we can identify an emergent tendency in the contemporary period for memoirs to engage more directly with some specific social articulations of militarism than had been the case before the early 1990s. There is a sense in which a number of memoirs – and primarily the best-selling memoirs – contribute directly to an idea of war as entertainment, providing books that give the reader an absorbing, engaging tale of action and adventure which, to put it bluntly, makes war seem like fun. We would not wish to overstate the case here, as for every best-seller there is another with more modest sales and more modest stories about the horrors, traumas and pity of war. But for those in the action-adventure mould, we can start to think of the memoir as a media form worthy of investigation as part of what James Der Derian (2009) and others call the 'military-industrial-media-entertainment' network, even if this is not the intention of the authors. Although much of the focus on the military-entertainment nexus has been on gaming and on film, we can identify a number of multiple media cross-overs between the books and their authors, and other media formats that are more explicitly about entertainment. Note, for example, that Chris Ryan, a best-selling military author and television personality whose writing career started with the publication of his account with the Bravo Two Zero patrol made famous by McNab under the title *The One That Got Away* (first published in 1995), provides a blog for the computer game *Medal of Honor*. Or see the interactive website established around Ed Macy's *Apache* and *Hellfire* (www.edmacy.com). It appears that the literature of war is increasingly escaping from between the covers of books and engaging directly with a wider popular culture of war as entertainment. This culture prioritises an idea of the soldier which accords to almost stereotypical models of military masculinity.

Yet, as we have said, the covers do very different work to the texts themselves. So whilst the covers invite the reader in, once there the conventions and intentions of the genre are broad

enough to allow for quite different articulations and explanations of the self, his role, his purpose, his military identity as a man, and so on. One example, explored by Claire Duncanson (2010), shows how disruptions to dominant discourses do appear in memoir accounts, which in turn, she argues, has consequences for how we might think of the potential for military engagement as peace support. Another example would be the emotional attachment – love, even – which sits at the core of so many memoirs. The emotional bonds of love and shared understanding and support between soldiers have long been understood as a significant indispensable and necessary feature of military life (Woodward 2008). In many memoirs, stories about the emotional bonds between fighting men provide a moral core to the story – see, for example, the role played by Ranger Cupples in Patrick Bury’s (2010) account of operations in Sangin, Afghanistan, or that of Major Shahrukh of the Afghan National Police in Doug Beattie’s (2008) account of action in Garmsir. These are stories of violence, but they are also stories of love, respect and friendship. The distant, faceless, elite automaton bearing the promise of adrenalized chaos, promised by the covers of so many books, is absent. Open the pages and there is a man, heroic often, but a fleshed, feeling human being nonetheless.

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Figure 1: From Bravo Two Zero by Andy McNab, published by Corgi. Used by permission of The Random House Group Limited.

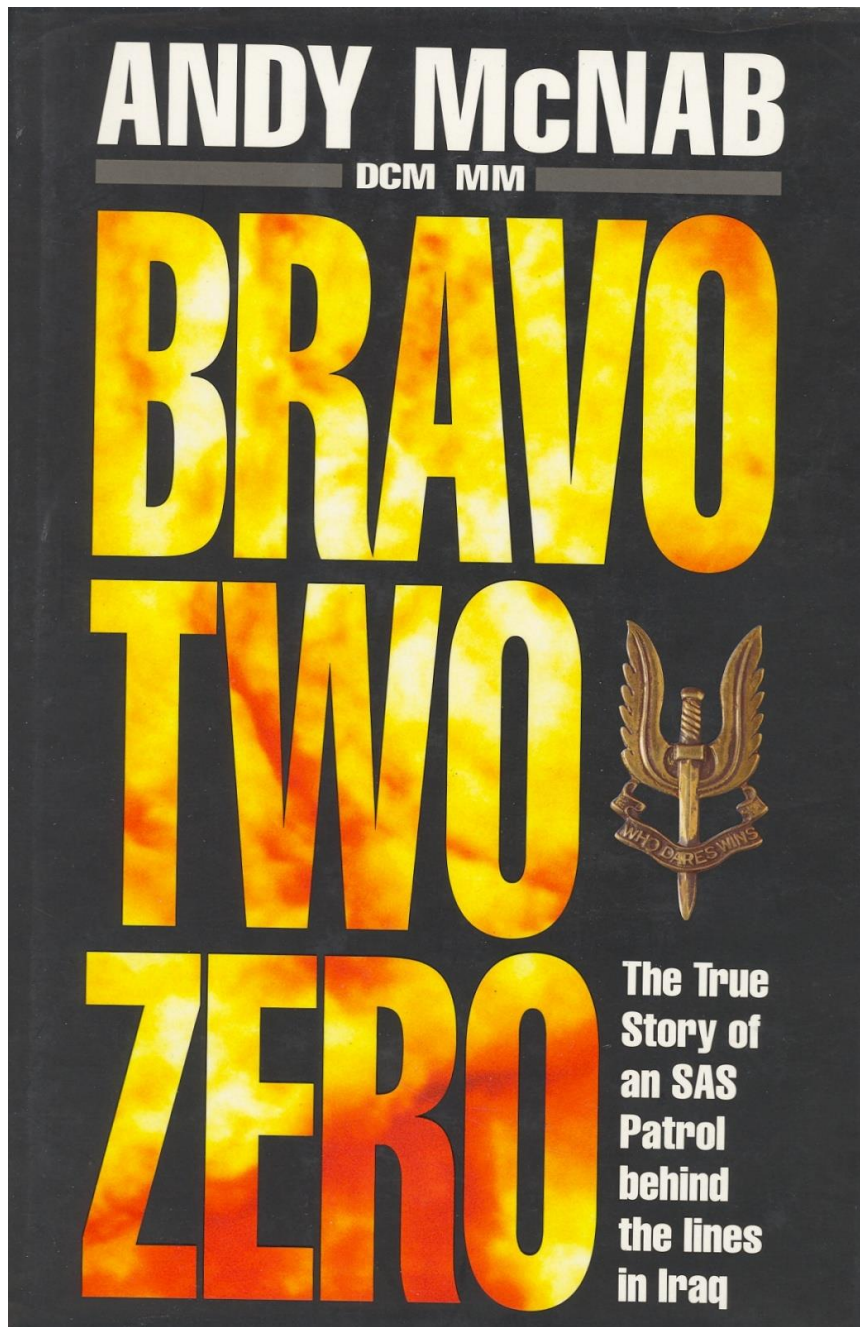


Figure 2: Front cover, *Sniper One*, Dan Mills, published by Penguin, 2008. Used with permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

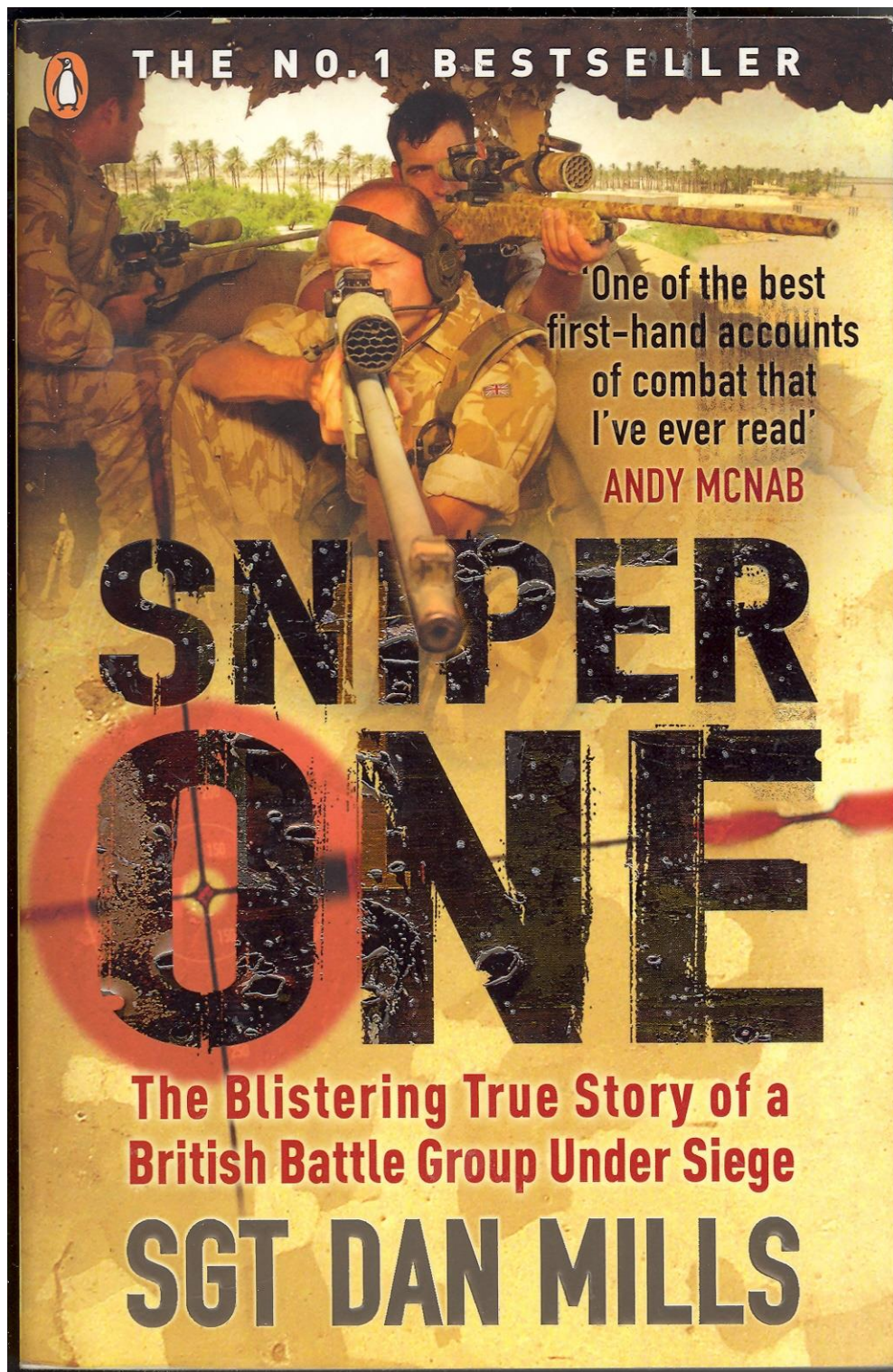


Figure 3: Front cover, *Falklands Commando*, Hugh McManners, published by William Kimber and Co, 1984. Permission requested from Harper Collins.

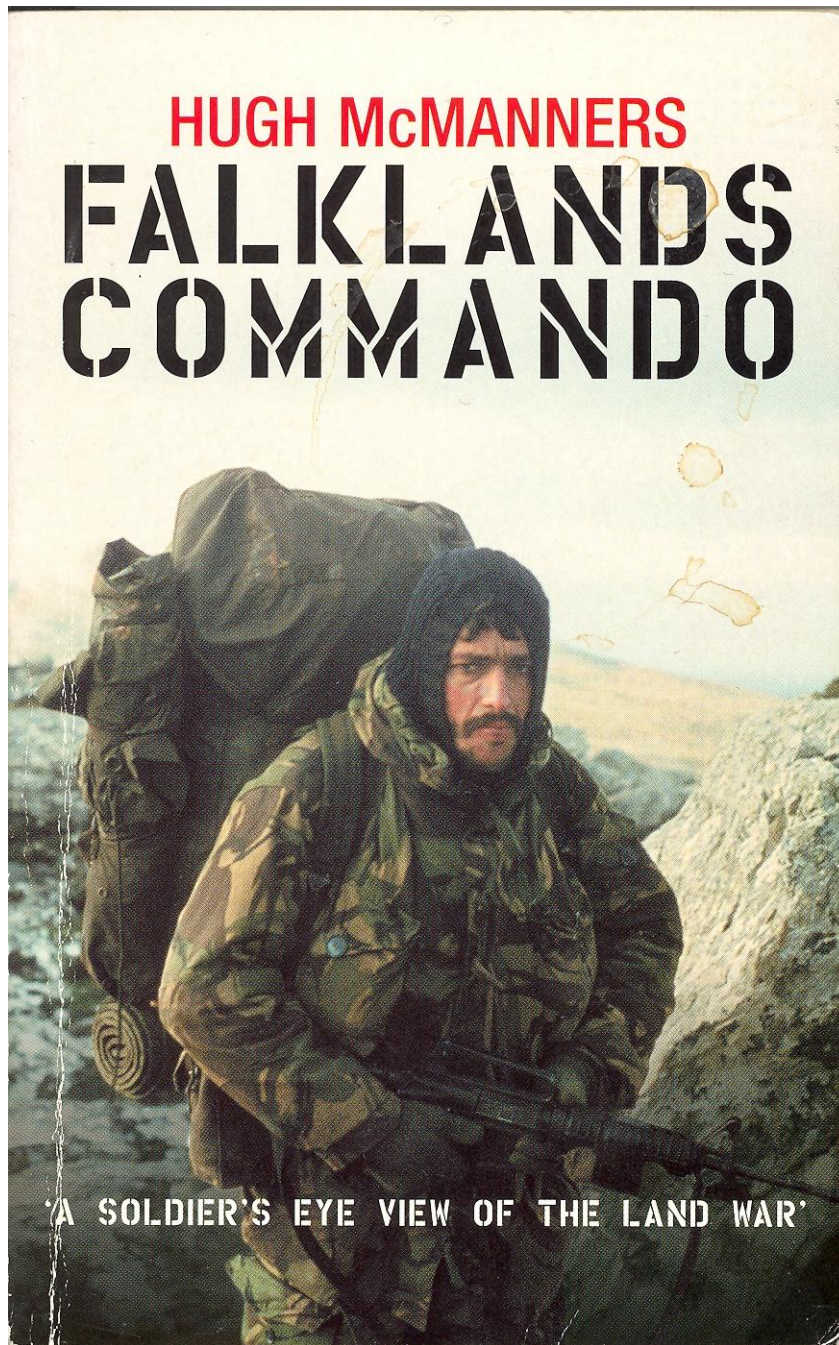


Figure 4: Front cover, *Excursion to Hell*, Vincent Bramley, published by Bloomsbury, London, 1991. Used by permission of Bloomsbury Publishing plc.

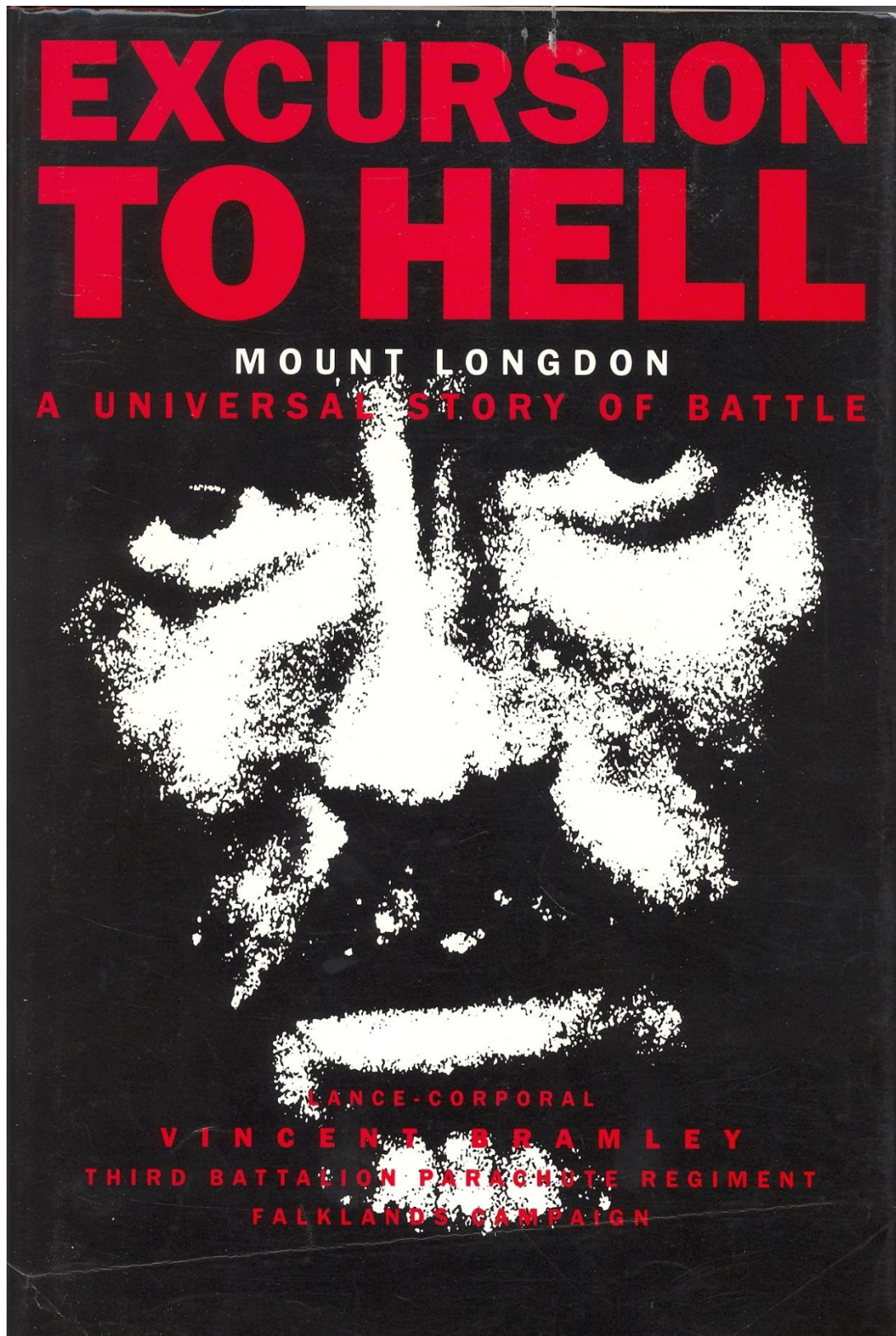


Figure 5: Front cover, *Terminal Velocity*, Steve Devereaux, published by Smith Gryphon Ltd., 1997.

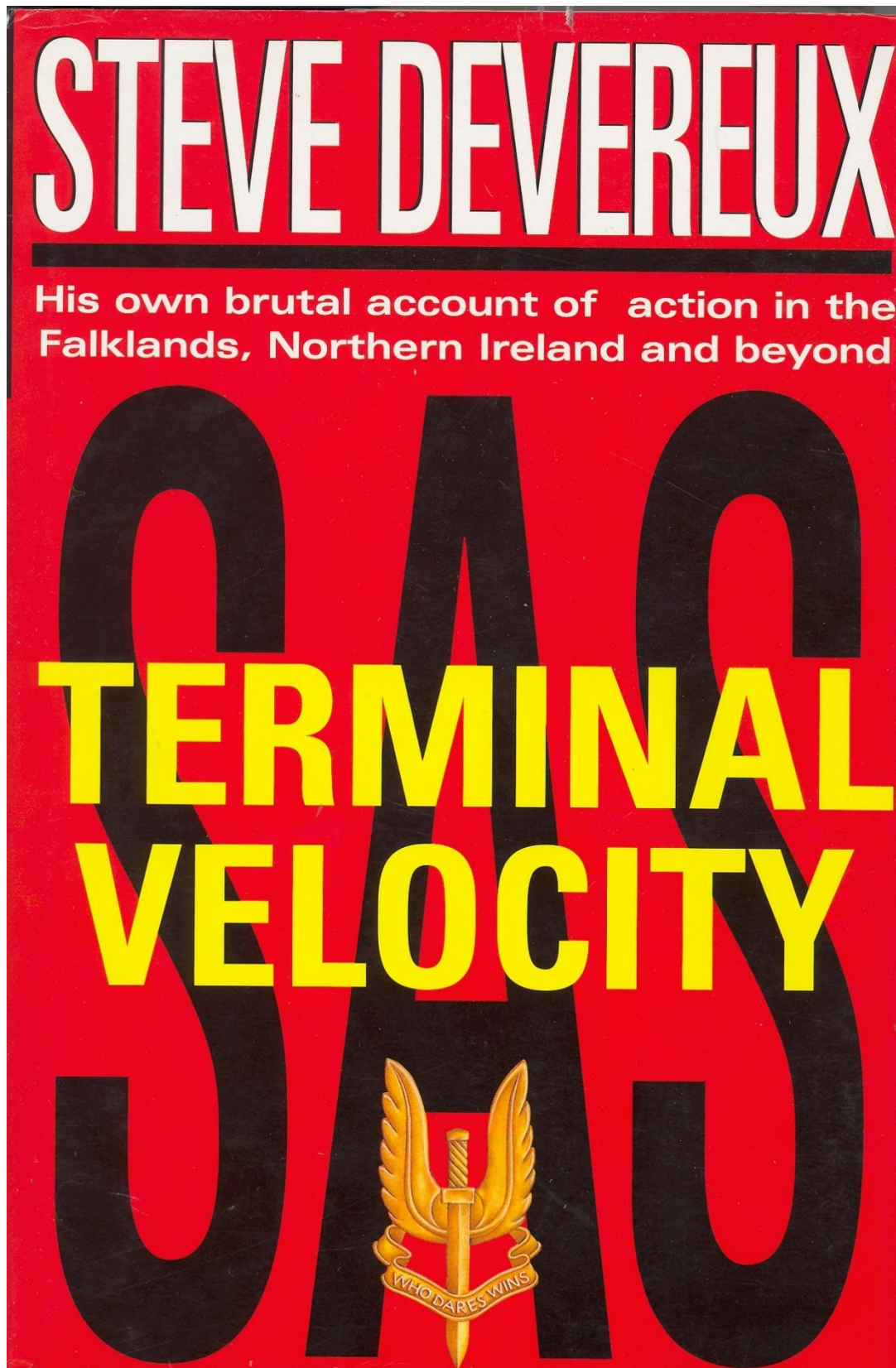


Figure 6: Front cover, *For Queen and Country*, Nigel 'Spud' Ely, published by Blake Publishing, 2003. Used by permission of John Blake Publishing Ltd.

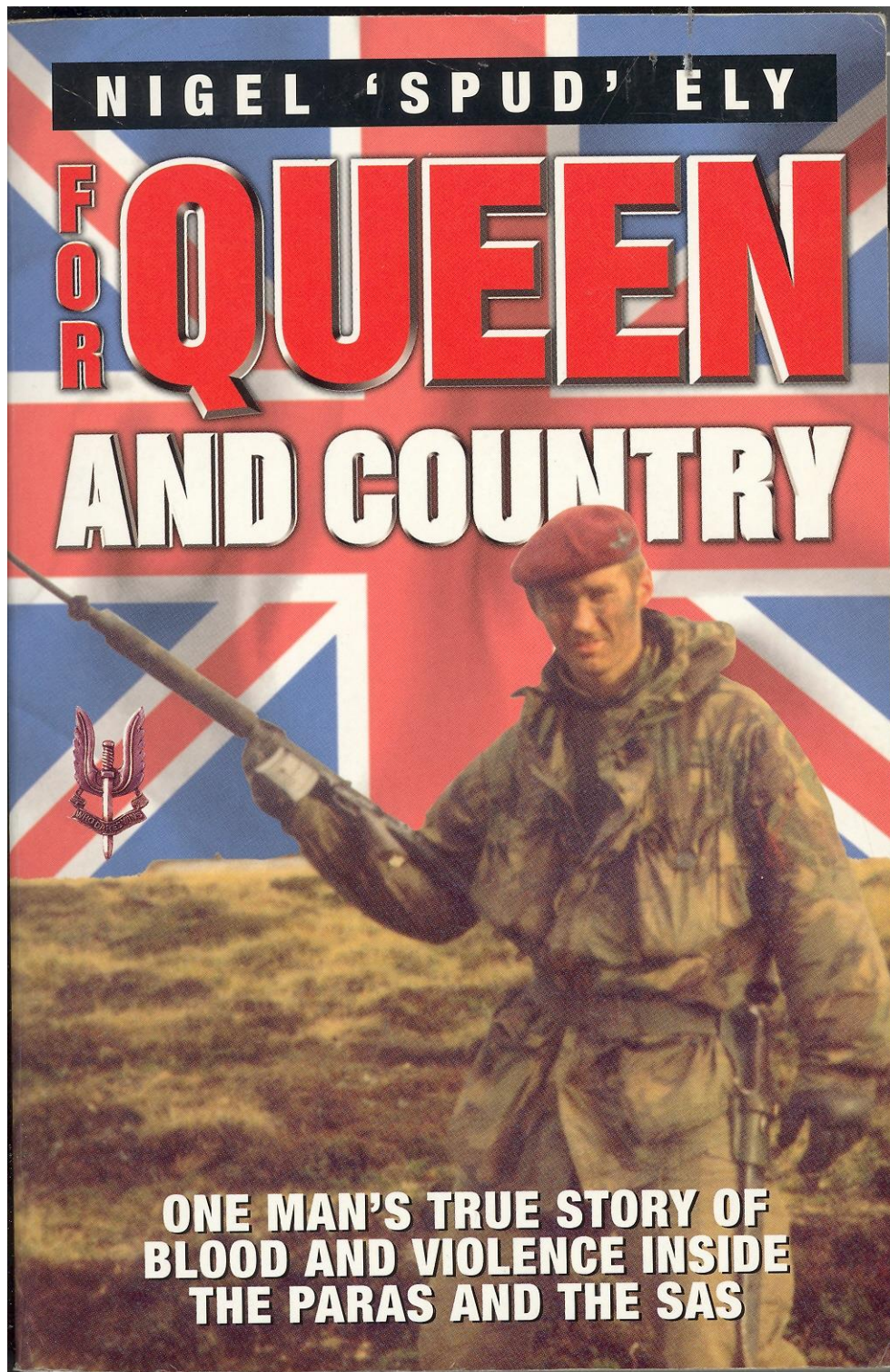


Figure 7: Front cover, hardback edition, *The Junior Officers' Reading Club*, Patrick Hennessey, published by Allen Lane, 2009. Used by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

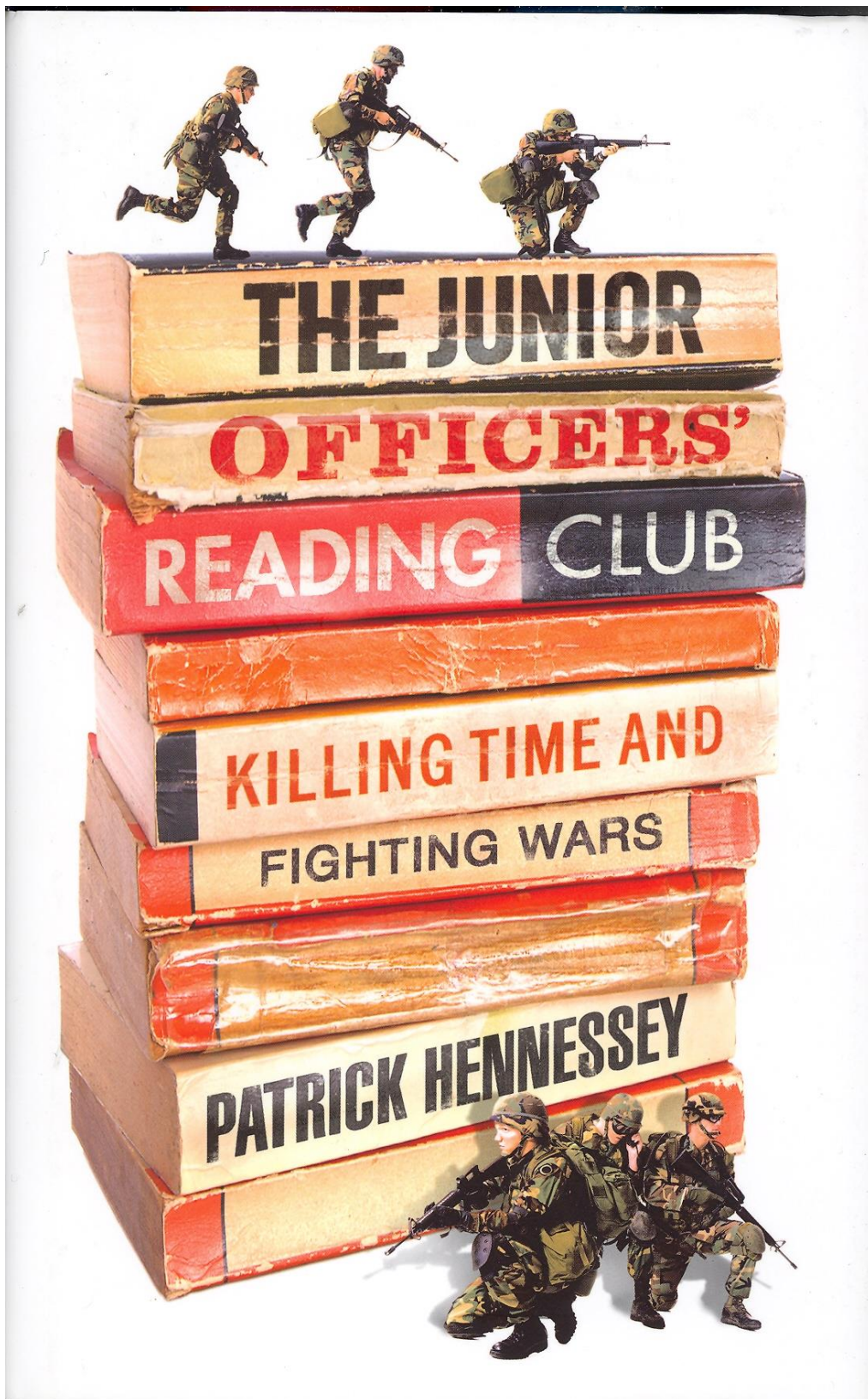


Figure 8: Front cover, paperback edition, *The Junior Officers' Reading Club*, Patrick Hennessey, published by Penguin, 2010. Used by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

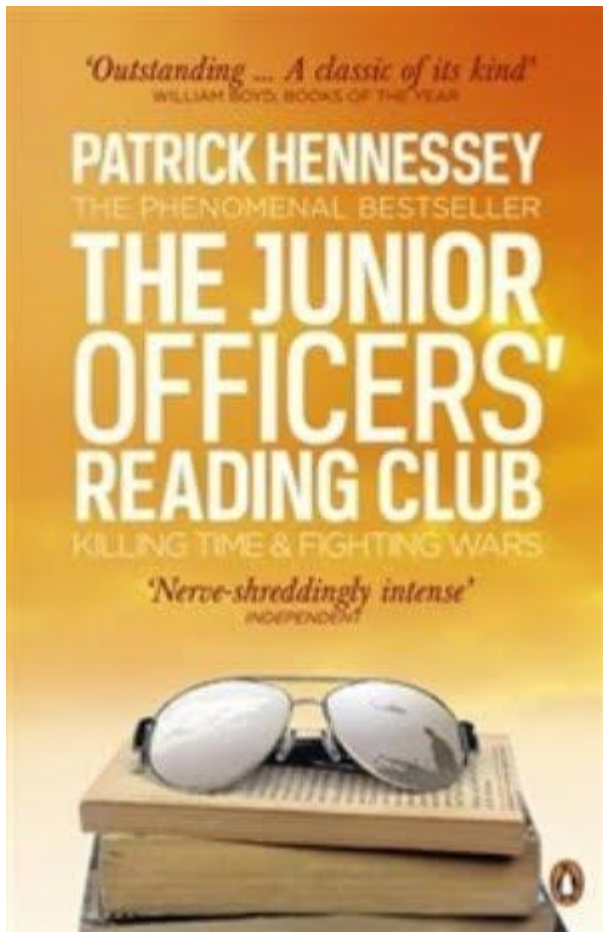
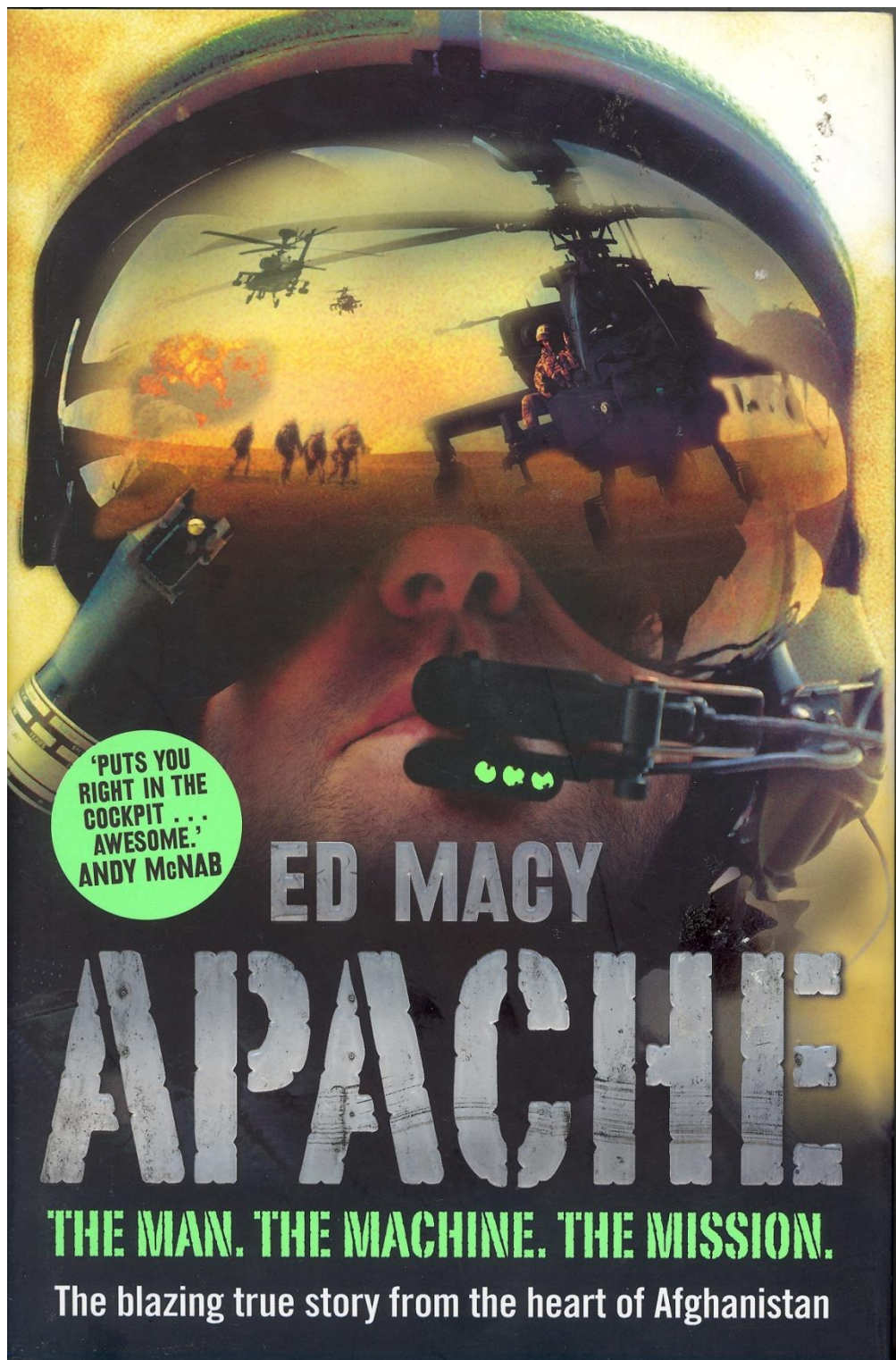


Figure 9: Front cover, *Apache*, Ed Macy, published by HarperPress, 2008. Permission requested from Harper Collins.



¹ Rachel Woodward and K.Neil Jenkins, *The Social Production of the Contemporary British Military Memoir*, 2009-11, Economic and Social Research Council grant RES 062-23-1493.

² Pen Farthing's *One Dog at a Time: Saving the Strays of Helmand* (2008) is marketed as a dog book, rather than as a military memoir. Written by a former Royal Marine Commando, the book recounts the establishment of a dog rescue charity following the author's deployment in Helmand province on an operational tour of Afghanistan and his experience with stray and abused Afghan dogs.

³ Both awards, which were awarded to other ranks, were discontinued in 1993. The Distinguished Service Order and Military Cross, which are awarded to both officers and other ranks, have replaced them.

⁴ Research interview, 2010.

⁵ Research interview, 2010.

⁶ Research interview, 2010.

⁷ John B. Thompson (2010: 38) makes the additional point that cover design illustrates how the values of mass-market paperback publication came to prevail in publishing over the more traditional values and practices of the hardcover business.

⁸ Research interview, 2010.

⁹ Research interview, 2010.

¹⁰ The term 'white van man' entered circulation in British media in the early 21st century as shorthand for semi-skilled, white, working-class male.

¹¹ Research interview.